DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 316 UD 024 536

AUTHOR	Sullivan, Mercer L.
TITLE	Teen Fathers in the Inner City: An Exploratory Ethnographic Study. A Report to the Ford Foundation Urban Poverty Program.
INSTITUTION	Vera Inst. of Justice, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	Apr 85
NOTE	79p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescents; Child Rearing; Community Attitudes; *Early Parenthood; *Economically Disadvantaged; Family Relationship; Father Attitudes; *Fathers; Minority Groups; *Parent Role; Pregnancy; Sex Education; *Sexuality; Unemployment; Urban Youth
IDENTIFIERS	New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

Ethnographic interviews and observations were conducted with a group of teenage males from one inner-city neighborhood who were biological and/or social fathers, i.e., males who were fulfilling fathering roles toward the children of their girlfriends. Some of the respondents were not supporting their children, but most were contributing partial support, usually without the knowledge of institutional service providers. They were interviewed concerning the social development of their attitudes and behavior with regard to sexuality and parenting and how their development was influenced by their parents, peers, and neighbors as well as by schools, employers, social service agencies, and the criminal justice system. The interviewers paid particular attention to the role played by high rates of unemployment and underemployment within local communities and how these economic hardships shaped the households and families of these individuals. The findings of the study challenge pre-existing stereotypes of universally heedless, exploitative, and irresponsible behavior. While some of the respondents' behavior may be seen as exploitative and thrill-seeking, this did not preclude strong feelings of paternity. The young fathers, their peers who were non-supporting fathers, and other residents of their community all condemned the abandonment by fathers of their children. At the same time, all members of the community recognized the difficulty of obtaining jobs, particularly for those still in their teens. A remarkable diversity of arrangements for child care and financial support found within the sample suggests that economic and educational opportunities are as influential as moral character or ability in determining who in this community works, receives welfare, or takes care of children. Finally, these data suggest several ways in which current social policies affect patterns of fathering, ranging from sex education and school programs for parenting teens to child support requirements, welfare services, and employment training programs. (KH)

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Teen Fathers in the Inner City:
An Exploratory Ethnographic Study

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April, 1985

A Report to the Ford Foundation
Urban Poverty Program
Prudence Brown
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UD 024536

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Introduction

Until recently, research and programs addressing the social problems associated with teenage pregnancy have dealt almost exclusively with teenaged mothers. Very little research has examined the role of young fathers or the range of their options when confronting adolescent parenthood. In the past few years, operators of social programs for young mothers have discovered that the young unmarried mothers are frequently still involved with the fathers of their children. As a result, some existing programs for the mothers have begun to include participating fathers in their services and new programs have been created to serve the fathers directly. New efforts to enforce child support payments have also been advanced in response to rising rates of illegitimacy. A small amount of research on the fathers has begun to appear that challenges pre-existing stereotypes of universally heedless, exploitative, and irresponsible behavior but has done little to document the social process by which young men decide to accept or evade responsibility for their sexual activity.

Understanding this process and others that shape the eventual household and financial arrangements by which the child of an unmarried teenage girl comes to be supported requires an examination not just of the young mother's and father's circumstances, attitudes, and behavior, but also of the community resources, norms, and social networks that powerfully shape the actions of relatively powerless adolescents.

The incidence of illegitimate births to teenagers varies tremendously among communities. There has been a nationwide historical trend among all teenagers towards less fertility but a higher proportion of illegitimate births. These trends vary considerably by community and are particularly distinctive in poor, non-white, and urban areas. While the increase in the proportion of illegitimate births in relation to all births has been sharper among whites, the absolute percentages of illegitimate births among black teenagers have reached historical peaks and are seen by many policy analysts as well as by many black leaders (Hulbert, 1984) as a crisis of major proportions. Though blacks as a group have made considerable political and economic progress in recent decades, that progress has been spread very unevenly among the black population. Early childbearing has been suggested as a major factor in the differentiation of economic attainments among blacks (McLanahan, 1985).

Black teenagers in inner-city neighborhoods, particularly, experience a disproportionate share of unemployment, interrupted education, involvement in crime and the criminal justice system, and unplanned pregnancy and childbearing. In inner-city neighborhoods, unemployed youths, unwed teenage fathers, school-leavers, and delinquents are quite frequently the same people. While none of these deviant statuses is necessarily condoned or respected within their communities, such experiences and situations are common enough that they may be considered normal, if not normative.

This paper presents the results of ethnographic interviews and observations among a group of teenage males from one inner-city neighborhood who were biological and/or social fathers. Many of them had also experienced different combinations of unemployment, interrupted education, and involvement in crime and the criminal justice system. Some of these respondents were not supporting their children, but most were contributing partial support, usually without the knowledge of institutional service providers. They were interviewed concerning the social development of their attitudes and behavior with regard to sexuality and parenting and how that development was influenced by their parents, peers, and neighbors as well as by schools, employers, social service agencies, and the criminal justice system.

These data concern only a small number of individuals and are not presented for the purpose of making generalized estimates of how widespread the different patterns described here might be among a larger population. Rather, the attempt here is to describe and explore some ways in which teen fatherhood is defined and responded to within local communities. Particular attention is paid to the role played by high rates of unemployment and underemployment within these communities, to patterned ways of coping with these economic hardships, and to how these economic patterns shaped the households and families of these individuals.

Despite the small number of individuals described here, many elements of their situations are similar and they appear to operate within a distinctive range of possibilities for dealing with early fatherhood. Child support is not an all or nothing proposition for most of them. They, their parents, and their communities appear to acknowledge certain criteria for establishing and maintaining some of the rights and duties of fatherhood even in the absence of marriage, co-residence, and full financial support. Much of the analysis here concerns the manner in which the negotiation of such rights and duties is achieved within one particular community. The goal of the analysis is primarily exploratory, to suggest patterned ways in which teen fatherhood in the absence of marriage is both generated and channelled within inner-city environments.

Teen Pregnancy as a Social Problem

The existing research literature on teen parenthood indicates that early parenting is associated with a number of generally undesirable outcomes for both parents and offspring. Numerous studies have indicated that teen parenthood is associated with prior and subsequent poverty, high rates of welfare dependency, health problems for the offspring, and lowered educational and occupational attainments in the young parents' subsequent careers. Yet some writings also indicate that these associated problems are largely the result of sociocultural definitions of early parenting as deviant. Such definitions are not universal across societies or even within our own society. Davis (1980) attributes the definition of teen parenthood as pathological to the widening gap between biological and social maturity. Contemporary teenagers in advanced societies reach biological maturity earlier than their peers in under developed areas (Anastasiow, 1982), yet the period of education and labor market entry required before they can obtain jobs that might allow them to support a family grows ever longer. Early parenthood is a "problem" for society and for the young parents themselves because it upsets this socio-culturally "normal" process of maturation.

In some communities, however, assumptions about normal progressions through schooling and into careers of stable employment may not apply. The inner-city neighborhoods in which there are high rates of birth to unmarried teenagers are the same neighborhoods in which residents suffer from poverty, racial and ethnic discrimination, unemployment and underemployment. A long tradition of research treated these neighborhoods as "socially disorganized" and family life within them as "pathological."

Yet, childbearing cannot be considered abnormal, pathological and undesirable in the same sense as crime, poverty, or drug addiction. Health problems are unambiguously associated only with births to extremely young mothers, those younger than 15 or 16 (Anastasiow, 1982; Menken, 1981). The major disadvantages accruing to childbearing in the late teens appear to be social disadvantages, including the possible deleterious effects of parental immaturity on the socialization of their children and the well documented associations between early childbearing and subsequent attenuation of the parents' education and socioeconomic status (Card and Wise, 1981). As with many analyses of social problems in poor areas characterized by high rates of many kinds of deviance, however, it is difficult to say which comes first, the poverty or the problems. Crime and drug addiction are widely condemned, even within poor communities, but the same cannot be said about conceiving and bearing healthy babies, even when this is done without explicit planning or assurance of a source of financial support.

Carol Stack's All Our Kin (1975) has greatly advanced the understanding of family life in poor, urban, black neighborhoods by documenting many positive aspects of child-rearing and child-support patterns in these neighborhoods. Her work has effectively challenged longstanding assumptions concerning the social disorganization of ghetto neighborhoods and the inevitable pathology of female-headed households. Not only did she document considerable male participation in such households, she also showed how "folk" definitions of kin ties and associated rights and duties make possible the nurture and support of children under conditions of insufficient access to the labor market. Her field observations called into question the accuracy and especially the interpretation of social statistics on family life among poor, urban, minority populations.

The literature on teenage pregnancy, much of which consists of interpretations of social statistics, also points in several places to ambiguities of interpretation. Although many studies have documented the association of teenage pregancy with high rates of poverty and welfare dependency, the direction of the relationship between poverty and early childbearing is far from clear (Trussel, 1981). The concentration of illegitimate births in poor, inner-city areas raises similar questions. Although this phenomenon has been often interpreted as the harm inflicted on the young mother by the exploitative and abandoning, usually young, father, some evidence indicates that the young mother and her family frequently oppose marriage unless or until the male becomes capable of financial support (Lieberman, 1984; Furstenberg, 1976).

Teen fathers in the inner city suffer multiple labor market disadvantages. In addition to age-related disadvantages which disappear rapidly in their early twenties, they also receive inferior education and have fewer of the personal contacts to jobs which account for most job-getting. Although some studies indicate that early fatherhood has negative consequences even controllling for socio-economic factors (Furstenberg, et al., 1981), many young men in the inner cities will not have careers of stable employment regardless of whether or at what age they become fathers.

The studies by Stack, Furstenberg, and others indicate that inner-city residents, no less than members of the middle class, associate marriage with stable employment and shared residence. Although stable employment and nuclear family residential groupings are present in even the poorest urban neighborhood, they are much less frequent than in more affluent areas. To the extent that labor market disadvantage is a consequence not just of age but of community conditions, it is not surprising that childbearing and childrearing are not postponed to a predictable, stable future.

The specific situation of teen fathers in the inner city still remains sparsely documented in any form. A few recent writings have suggested that many teen fathers in inner-city areas may in fact be contributing some support, financial and otherwise, to their offspring, even in the absence of marriage or co-residence (Lieberman, 1984; Barret and Robinson, 1982; Gershenson, 1983). In addition, many other fathers may want to support but be unable to find employment. Given the availability of welfare to the young mother and child more than to the young father and the association of a father's rights in his children with his provision of financial support, these young men face not only unemployment but also the loss of their children.

The analysis of the data reported here is modeled after Stack's, repeats a number of her findings, and expands this perspective by focusing in more detail on the experiences and perceptions of young males who father children. The development of their sexual and parenting behavior is described along with the negotiation of the rights and duties of fatherhood among the young parents and their families.

Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

The data presented here are drawn from ethnographic observations and taped life-history interviews with young males from one inner-city neighborhood who were fathers, who thought they were about to become fathers, or who were fulfilling fathering roles towards the children of their girlfriends.

Some of these data were collected as part of an earlier study of experiences of schooling, employment, and crime among inner-city youths (Sullivan, 1984). Although sexuality and parenting were not the focus of the earlier study, a great deal of the data recorded in that study concerned the householding patterns of the youths studied and how their domestic arrangements affected and were affected by their patterns of participation in schooling, employment, and income-generating crime. A number of individuals from the earlier study either were teen fathers, thought that they were about to become fathers, or were fulfilling fathering roles.

The current study is based both on re-analysis of that earlier data and also on new data collected specifically for the purpose of examining patterns of teen fatherhood. Ongoing contacts in one of the neighborhoods studied earlier were activated for the purpose of recruiting a small number of teen fathers to participate in detailed life-history interviews concerning their family backgrounds, social and sexual development, and patterns of fathering.

The sample of individuals described here was thus not recruited at random. The original contacts were made in a search for youths involved in crime, though the criminal experiences of those eventually contacted covered quite a range from the trivial and experimental to the serious and chronic. The contacts made for the purposes of this study were made among those who were openly acknowledging fatherhood. Thus, the possibility exists that this sample is biased towards the criminally active and those acknowledging fatherhood. It should be noted that those recruited as "fathers" reported less criminal activity than those recruited as "criminals." However, these individuals were also recruited outside any one set of institutional channels and from naturally existing social networks. These young men knew each other and shared much of their social development, including the experience of becoming young fathers.

The data presented in this study of fathering describe youths from one of three neighborhoods examined in the earlier study. The intensive life-history interviews focusing on fathering were conducted with 11 youths from that neighborhood, to be referred to as "Projectville" here as in the previous study. The names of the youths have also been changed.

Teen Fathers in Projectville: Their Neighborhood and Family Backgrounds

Projectville is a neighborhood in which most of the housing consists of public housing projects. The population is predominantly black and contains disproportionate numbers of women, children, and the elderly as a result of public housing admission policies. The incidence of adolescent pregnancy for this neighborhood, as recorded in Health District statistics, is very near the highest in New York City (Center for Public Advocacy Research, 1982). Although the neighborhood has a reputation for being poor and heavily dependent on public assistance, part of the population is stably employed at jobs in the post office, the health field, and city government. These working families receive less rent subsidy than those dependent on public assistance. Still, the concentrations of welfare-dependent, officially female-headed households are among the highest in the City. Census statistics indicate that over 60 percent of the households in this area are classified as female-headed and that about half of all households receive some form of public assistance.

As Stack has noted, however, official statistics may conceal as much as they reveal about household and family patterns in poor areas with high rates of welfare dependency. Of the 11 youths from Projectville who were interviewed intensively for this project, only two had grown up in households primarily supported by stably employed adult males. Zap's father had worked as a city bus driver for many years and also led a small church congregation on weekends. Steve's father had worked for over 20 years in the same factory.

None of the other youths had lived with their fathers for a comparable period of time, although several of them had had considerable contact with their fathers. Lucky's father and mother had been separated since he was three years old but his father lived in the same neighborhood and had always had weekly, sometimes even daily contact with his children, including regular gifts of money to the children but no official alimony or child support. Two other youths, Jesse and Tom, lived in households to which their fathers made regular court-ordered payments for years. Kevin had lived with his father until the age of 13, at which time his father was sent to prison for murdering Kevin's mother's lover. Stan's father evaded court orders that he make payments to his family after he and Stan's mother separated when Stan was 9, but Stan brought home regular income while he was in high school from working in his fathers' "numbers store" (a gambling operation) after school. Mike's and Ollie's fathers were deceased. Only Zeke and Harold had been completely abandoned, financially and emotionally, by their fathers. Even though the others would have been classified by census procedures as living in "female-headed households," they had all received a significant amount of emotional or financial support from their fathers while they were growing up.

Similarly, official statistics on welfare dependency are often misleadingly interpreted to suggest that total welfare dependency is an entrenched life-style in a neighborhood like Projectville, willingly chosen and transmitted from generation to generation. In fact, careful studies of welfare dependency suggest that enrollment for public assistance is more often short- than long-term, even though the same individual may enroll and withdraw several times in response to cycles of childbearing, employment, and unemployment (Harrison, 1972). Although most of these youths' households had been supported by public assistance payments at some point, welfare dependency was fairly brief in several cases. Zeke and Ollie were the only two who reported having grown up primarily on welfare budgets. Lucky, Harold, and Stan reported that their mothers had taken welfare only when their children were small and had subsequently gone to work. Jesse's mother had received partial welfare payments, in addition to his father's court-ordered payments, for a few years until they were cut off by new regulations "under Reagan." Mike's household was supported by his father's Social Security and Army pensions. Kevin's and Zap's parents had never received assistance.

The interrelationships of childbearing, welfare dependency, employment, and the life-cycle in Projectville are further clarified by a look at the older siblings, particularly the older sisters of these youths. Mike was the only one among them who had an older sister who was a mother married to and living with the father of her child. Mike's brother-in-law was stably employed and supported his family. Zap, Jesse, Harold, Lucky, and Tom, however, all had older sisters who were unmarried, had children, and were living at home with their parent(s). All of these older sisters received welfare budgets which included only them and their children. Yet, none of the mothers of these young mothers were themselves receiving public assistance for themselves or for dependent children of their own at the time of the interviews. These older women had all received assistance when their own children were small and then had gone to work at some point after their children had reached school age.

The youths who had older unmarried sisters with children also reported a variety of relationships between their sisters and the fathers of the sisters' children. Tom's sister received no support from and had no further contact with the father of her child. In the other cases, however, their sisters retained some relationship with and received some financial support from the fathers of their children. Jesse had two older sisters in this situation. The younger of the two was still romantically involved with the father, who was working and gave her money regularly. The older of the two did not see the father of her child very often, but he did visit occasionally and always contributed some money when he did, though he always gave the money to the grandmother of the child and never directly to the mother. Lucky's sisters also saw the fathers of the children only occasionally and usually received some financial contribution whenever the fathers did visit. Zap's sister had gotten pregnant by a man who soon left the country with the Marines but later reestablished contact and began to make regular contributions by mail and irregular visits when on leave. Harold said that his 20-year-old sister remained very close to the father of her 2-year-old child, but that his contributions fluctuated according to the level of his employment:

> Harold: He's working jobs, different types of jobs. Since the baby's been born, he was unemployed for about a month once, but he takes care of the baby the best way he can. From what they tell me, they still waiting for him to get a steady job so they can both move out to their own apartment.

By the time the youths who were interviewed for this research had fathered their own children, they had frequently observed patterns of partial or intermittent child support both in their own immediate households as well as in the households of their friends and neighbors. As will be described in much greater detail below, most of these youths went on to emulate these patterns of fathering.

Besides the fact that they frequently observed these fathering patterns, they also frequently participated in the care of younger children as they were growing up. Some had younger siblings while others took care of their sisters' or cousins' children. Childrearing in Projectville, as in Stack's "Flats", was usually accomplished not within nuclear families or isolated households but within kin-based networks extending over frequently shifting household arrangements. As Harold observed:

> Harold: It's not like I never had any experience around kids. I mean, after all, my sister has a 2-year-old son and I was around when he was growing up. And then I grew up around a big family. I was always around little kids, you know. My cousins have kids too.

Harold himself was cared for by his mother's sisters when he was very young:

> Harold: Before we moved to the projects, we all lived in the tenements. I had an aunt who lived on the same floor as us and another aunt who lived

> upstairs. My aunt who lived downstairs, she didn't work, and my mother was working, so she used to take care of us. Then we got in the projects first and later on my aunts got into different projects but by that time we were all going to school.

Most of the other youths also reported having taken care of children. Lucky's relationship to the researcher has extended over several years, and he occasionally showed up for interviews with his sisters' children in tow even before he assumed paternal responsibilities himself.

Social Context of Sexual Development

The interviews with these youths also generally confirmed existing research suggesting that the earlier sexual activity of black, inner-city teenagers results from the large amount of their time that is neither structured nor supervised by adults (Hogan and Kitawaga, 1985). Parents generally do not have the resources to enforce their teenaged children's school attendance or to supervise them when they are not in school. More than half the households in Projectville are headed by only one parent. Many of these households include younger children who occupy most of the mother's time. When there are not young children present, the mother usually works. If both parents are present, both often must work low-wage jobs. Most jobs require a substantial commute outside the neighborhood. As a result, teenagers are expected to care for themselves as much as possible. They also usually know someone whose apartment is empty during school and after-school hours while the parents are at work or away.

This situation can create friction between the generations, particularly if the teenagers invite casual acquaintances into their parents' apartments. The mother of Steve's child was 17 and an emancipated minor as a result of a chain of events that began after her school acquaintances came to her house for a "hooky party" and one of them stole her mother's jewelry. Barring such occurrences, however, many youths maintain ready access to apartments during the day time. Tom described the arrangements for most of his early sexual activities:

> Tom: My uncle has a place nearby. I always had a key and he was at work every day. My cousin used to call and say, "Hey, cuz, I got a couple of girls over here." And I would go over and that's what we used to do all the time.

The large amounts of unsupervised time available to these youths resulted not only from their parents' lack of resources but also from their own irregular school attendance and unemployment. As is described in more detail in an earlier study (Sullivan, 1984), Projectville youths have both a strong commitment to education as well as particular difficulty in access to schooling. They have no local high school and are scattered among eight different City high schools, all distant from their neighborhood and many with racially tense environments. Though the schools are free, poverty puts these youths at extreme disadvantage in social competition. They particularly suffer from their lack of clothing and frequently leave school to seek ways of finding money for the clothes their parents cannot afford. Their employment prospects during their mid-teens are extraordinarily bleak. Most of the jobs reported by these youths and those in the earlier study during their mid-teen years were government-sponsored summer youth jobs.

Poor, unemployed, excluded from the social life of the school, many become involved in crime during this period. Low level street crime also proves unrewarding, however, and most eventually try to reestablish conformity by returning to school, usually through alternative programs. At some point during their middle teens, however, most of them go through periods when they are out of school and unemployed.

During their mid-teen years, then, most of these youths experience a period of exclusion from supervision by almost anyone that amounts to a kind of enforced leisure. The youths themselves experience this leisure alternatively as boredom or as license to create their own activities. Males typically spend most of their time in each other's company, but they also withdraw from the male peer group to engage in romantic and sexual liaisons with females. In the earlier study of involvements in crime, we found that youths who were beginning to lessen their involvement in group delinquencies usually began to separate themselves from the male peer group altogether by spending more time with females. Several reported this pattern in terms similar to the following description by Zap:

> Zap: I don't hardly hang out no more. I'm trying to cool out now and stay out of trouble. Most of the time I be with girls now.

This movement away from the male peer group appears to be common for most of these youths, as well as for most males generally, during the late teens. Whether in the late teens or earlier, however, romantic and sexual relationships constituted the principal alternative to the male peer group and associated fighting and stealing as a way of establishing masculinity and of spending excess leisure time.

Sexual Development and Knowledge and Use of Contraception

After discussions of family background and the household arrangements in which they themselves grew up, the interviews with these youths then turned to the subject of their own sexual development. Specifically, the researcher sought to determine the age at which each youth became sexually active, the age at which he became aware of various forms of birth control, the sources of his knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes towards birth control, and how knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes changed over time.

In contrast to the dearth of research on actual patterns of fathering among teenage males, there does exist a certain amount of research on teenage male sexuality and use of contraception. Lower-class and minority males have generally been found to become sexually active at younger ages than middle-class, white males. Teenagers generally have much less knowledge of the facts of reproduction than older people. Sex education courses provided through schools reach less than half the nation's teenagers and do not always teach contraception when they are given. Finally, even those sexually active teenage males who can demonstrate some knowledge of reproduction and contraception seem to hold attitudes that keep them from making use of their knowledge of contraception (Reichelt and Werley, 1981; Orr, 1982; Finkel and Finkel, 1981).

The behavior and attitudes reported by the Projectville youths seem generally to conform to these findings from earlier research. Considerable variation was reported among this group, however. One finding of some interest is the fact that school health and sex education programs appear to have been major sources of knowledge for them, even if this knowledge did not translate into behavior that would keep them from causing pregnancies.

Most of these youths reported having become sexually active around the age of 14. Mike reported the earliest age for beginning sexual intercourse, 12. Kevin's reported age for first sexual intercourse was 16, two years later than anyone else interviewed. Zap and Oliver were 13 at first intercourse. The others all were 14.

They varied considerably in their knowledge of reproduction and birth control at the time they first became sexually active. Most were aware of the link between sexual intercourse and reproduction, but some did not know about any form of birth control until later. Others knew about condoms, which they usually called "bags"; but none of them made regular use of any form of birth control until after they had been active for some time, if ever.

One youth, Kevin, reported that he was not even aware of the connection between sexual intercourse and reproduction until shortly after he first had intercourse:

> Interviewer: How old were you when you first had sex with a girl?
>
> Kevin: Young, 16.

> Interviewer: OK. And were you pretty well aware of the facts of life, that you could make a baby?
>
> Kevin: Uh uh. We were kids. I didn't even know what fucking was.
>
> Interviewer: How did you find out?
>
> Kevin: Some of my friends, right, they'd just pop out with a bag, you see. We'd be talking about girls, and one of my friends would come out with one of them bags. And I don't understand, you know. He said, "Ain't you never used one of these things before?" [Kevin replied] "Oh, man, I'm not putting that shit on my dick." I said, "What I ever use that for? I'm not wasting my shit."
>
> Interviewer: But say you know about bags and all by now. How did you learn more?
>
> Kevin: From her. From my girl. She told me about it.

Kevin's lack of knowledge was unique among those interviewed. The others all said that they knew that sex made babies when they first became active, but three of the others, Mike, Zap, and Stan, said that they had been engaging in sexual intercourse for one to two years before they learned about birth control. Tom said that he knew about condoms but did not use them at first, thinking that he could not impregnate because "I thought I was too young."

Those who knew something about birth control when they became sexually active still lacked extensive or accurate knowledge. They acquired this knowledge gradually over the next few years, from a variety of sources including their parents, their older brothers and sisters, their peers, their female sexual partners, the mass media, and, prominently mentioned by most, school-based sex and health education programs. All these sources of information fell short of their felt needs.

As has been found in other research (Finkel and Finkel, 1981; Rainwater, 1970), their parents were usually not their primary sources of information. Embarrassment, especially between mothers and sons, appears to have been a major barrier. Tom was the only one to report that his father instructed him in the use of condoms:

> Tom: I was about 14 when my father showed me about condoms.
>
> Interviewer: Did he encourage you to use them?
>
> Tom: Not really. He said, "You can use them if you want to."

Stan expressed open regret about his own lack of knowledge:

> Stan: I wasn't too educated at first, right ... I never got that message from my mother or my father about contraceptives. My mother never told me anything, and I never heard anything from my father when I did see him. Maybe they couldn't face ... maybe my mother couldn't face telling me because I was a young man and she was a woman.

Zap went even further in his description, suggesting that parental attitudes in the community were opposed to sex education in the schools:

> Zap: When they sent sex education at school and then the little girl or the little guy come home, you know, telling the mother what they learned and all that, then they'd get mad. You know, complain to the dean or principal. Then, another parent come up with it, and that's all you need right there, about three parents, and that's it. No more. No more. But what they do tell you, that's where I really learned.

The knowledge gathering process described by most of them involved comparing and combining what they learned from their older brothers and male friends with what they could learn in school, as in the following description by Harold:

> Interviewer: Did you know how babies where made when you started having sex?

> Harold: All I knew at that time was about birth control pills and condoms.
>
> Interviewer: How did you learn about those, from people you knew or from school?
>
> Harold: A little bit of both. Hygiene classes at school, people I knew, things I learned on the street.

Both these sources of information, schools and the street, failed to satisfy their perceived needs for knowledge. Learning from male peers took place in an atmosphere of jesting and boasting which inhibited the transfer of accurate information. The school-based programs which reached these youths appear to have presented condoms as methods for controlling disease rather than for preventing conception, as described by Stan:

> Stan: When I was in junior high school, we had a science class. We used to talk about the male chromosomes and the women's eggs, and how many sperm cells, but they never said anything about, you know ... only when we got to the subject of venereal diseases, then the contraceptives would come up. I would have preferred hearing from my mother and father, you know. I might not have a kid; I might be going to college.

Tom also said that he had had a difficult time getting the facts in school. He reported that he listened with great interest to the sex education materials presented to him in the eighth, ninth, and tenth grades successively, each time getting a better understanding:

> Tom: Finally, they gave us a book to study. And I took it home and kept it and studied it and that's how I finally learned.

During their first few years of sexual activity, then, these youths generally suffered from a lack of information. By the time they had fathered children, however, all of them, including Kevin, were knowledgeable about the link between sexual intercourse and pregnancy and all knew that the use of condoms could prevent pregnancy. A few knew about birth control pills by this point, but none had much knowledge of diaphragms or accurate knowledge of the menstrual cycle. Despite this knowledge, none of them practiced birth control regularly. Their non-use, or only sporadic use, of contraception stemmed not only from their lack of sufficient knowledge but also from their learned attitudes towards sexuality and the opposite sex, and, crucially, their relationships and sexual negotiations with females.

Zap's early experiences with sexual intercourse and the use and non-use of contraception provide a useful starting point for examining the way in which both knowledge of and learned attitudes towards sexuality and contraception contributed to these youths' behavior during their early years of sexual activity. Zap's gradual acquisition of knowledge and the final confirmation he eventually received from his school hygiene classes were described above. He had already become sexually active before that time. His first experience with sexual intercourse occurred when he was 14, with an older female provided by his older brother:

> Zap: He had brung these girls over, you know, they was all high and I was having wet dreams and all that. He was drunk and he said go ahead, and I went. My first sex with a lady.

He used no contraception at this time. He soon began finding his own sexual partners, closer to his own age but still usually a little older: "Almost every girl I had got at least a year on me." He began to practice withdrawal, which he called "getting up," quite early on. The desire to avoid conception did not motivate his withdrawal at first:

> Interviewer: In other words, the first few times you had sex, you didn't really have any idea of the consequences?
>
> Zap: Right. I just knew from what my fingers told me, to get up. Because a lot of girls, they don't like that sticky stuff. So I just got up, I said, there's no difference.

After he finally confirmed the facts of reproduction in school, however, he continued this practice, with occasional reinforcement from his female partners:

> Interviewer: So you learned about sex making babies in school?
>
> Zap: I learned, he do this, she take this, she get pregnant. That's when I started pullin' out all the time. I don't care. I just pulled out every time I got on.
>
> Interviewer: What about the girls, do you think they knew the consequences?
>
> Zap: A lot of them don't care. The oldest ones know about it, the youngest ones don't. But a lot of them don't care any old way.

His first experiences with condoms occurred at the age of 16, after he had already been sexually active for two years. His older brother, home from military service, took him to a brothel:

> Zap: My brother, right, when I was young, he used to take me some weird places, underground, nobody got no clothes and all that. You know, he used to give me a bag. It didn't even fit me, but ... so I caught on fast.
>
> Interviewer: Did he tell you that it was to keep you from getting diseased?
>
> Zap: He used to give me a lot, a box. He said, "Be careful, use these. Don't come in the girl, she have a baby."

This lesson had little effect, however, since it was soon undercut by the derisive comments of other males:

> Interviewer: Do you know any guys who use bags, or do they get up like you do or what?
>
> Zap: I don't think nobody use bags. I don't know.
>
> Interviewer: Do they ever talk about it? What do they say?
>
> Zap: They all talk about it. Let's say I be hangin' out, OK. [If somebody says,] "This girl wanted me to use a bag" [then somebody else says] "Man, you crazy." I remember when my brother use to take me out, one time I used to say, "Yeah, then I had this prostitute and I put on the bag." And they was laughing: "Bad enough you got to buy it, then you put on a bag." It was a joke.

Since that experience, he had occasionally used condoms, but only at the female's insistence.

Like Zap, the other youths in this group also reported that the only methods of prevention they had used during their early teens were condoms and withdrawal, but that they disliked condoms and had used them only infrequently and reluctantly. Unlike him, none of them claimed to have practiced regular withdrawal. Possibly because of this practice, Zap never did become a biological father during his teen years. He is included here because, as is described below, he assumed some paternal responsibilities toward the child of one of his female friends and former sex partners, even though he and she eventually concluded that he was not the actual father.

The others who had tried condoms all reported that they had used them only once or twice, usually at the insistence of the female, and then had refused to use them subsequently because of distaste and the loss of "feeling." Kevin not only said that he "hated the bag" but also maintained that "the bag don't work, anyway. It break, and there you are, all over the place." Ollie had used condoms on two occasions, both with older girls who provided them. Mike said that his 20-year-old brother had tried to explain several different kinds of birth control to him when he himself was 15 and had already been active for some time. He did not understand the descriptions of female barrier methods, but did understand the use of "Trojans." He only tried them twice, however, and discontinued use, although he did say that he had been aware that the girls could get pregnant and had worried about the possibility. Most vehement in his rejection of the use of condoms was Tom:

> Interviewer: Did a girl ever give you a bag and ask you to use it?
>
> Tom: Yeah. They do that sometimes.
>
> Interviewer: And what do you do?
>
> Tom: Throw it back in her face, walk out. [After a pause] Unless she's exceptionally pretty.

Besides Zap, some of the others also reported having attempted withdrawal as a means of contraception during their early sexual activity. Most agreed that, even if they began with the sincere intention of withdrawing, they could not be counted on actually to do so. Lucky and Stan were interviewed together on one occasion and described the following scenario with considerable drama and laughter:

> Stan: See, what usually happens is, the girl says, "I don't want to have a baby. You better pull out."
>
> Lucky: And the guy say, "Ok, honey, I won't come in you" but then, when the time comes, he don't, because ...
>
> Lucky and Stan in unison: It feels too good. [Laughter].

Harold said that he had only attempted withdrawal once:

> Harold: One girl I talked with, she wanted the idea of pulling out, but after trying it once, I was reluctant to try again, because that's the best feeling if you ask me. That moment, being without that, there's nothing to it.

Harold cited this experience as his only attempt to prevent preqnancy prior to becoming a father.

As these examples indicate, these youths not only knew about but had tried either condoms or withdrawal before eventually impregnating one of their partners. They generally did not like either of these methods and used them only at the request of their partners. They not infrequently had older partners who were more likely to know and insist on contraception than girls their own age. Three of them, Mike, Kevin, and Stan, had had older partners who used pills, or, in only one case, a diaphragm. The girls they and the others interviewed eventually impregnated were all their own ages or slightly younger, with the exception of Stan, who fathered the child of a female two years older than himself.

After they became fathers, they were much more likely to practice birth control, although some did not change their habits and others did not do so completely or immediately. They and the mothers of their children did gain much greater access to knowledge and support in the use of contraceptives, however, as a result of the attention of both medical practioners and members of their own families. At this point, the couples began to use other methods, usually birth control pills. Most of the males, however, did not limit their sexual activities to a single partner and thus were still at risk of impregnation. At the time he was first interviewed, Tom discussed his non-use of contraception and the burdens of fatherhood, but still said that he was not using and did not intend to use contraception. During his second interview, he revealed that he had been informed the previous day that his new girlfriend, not the mother of his 2-year-old son, was pregnant:

> Interviewer: Last time you told me that becoming a father hadn't influenced you to use birth control. Do you still feel that way now?
>
> Tom: No, I've been thinking about it. I guess I'll have to do something from now on.

In Mike's case, on the other hand, the event of his girlfriend's becoming pregnant prompted his older sister to begin sharing her knowledge both with him and with his girlfriend. She eventually directed the mother of her brother's child to a local clinic to obtain birth control pills.

Despite the frequent sexual activity and non-use of contraceptive measures, there is no indication that any of these youths consciously intended to father children, even when their knowledge of reproduction was adequate for them to understand that they were undertaking that risk. Nor is there a clear indication that they were significantly different from their non-father peers in their non-use of contraception or in the amount of their sexual activity. Though some expressed regret at their lack of knowledge, attitudes as much as ignorance appear to have been responsible for their non-use of contraception. These attitudes, in turn, were more characterized by fatalism than by intentionality. As with the females studied by Furstenberg (1976), parenthood was unplanned by them, if not unforeseen.

There is also no indication that these youths differed from their non-father peers in their sexual behavior and attitudes. Certainly, sexual experience, along with the ability to fight, provided a major validation of masculinity within the context of the adolescent male peer group. The exploitative sexual attitudes maintained within the adolescent male peer group, however, were not their only attitudes. When their partners became pregnant, most did not share the information with the male peer group or seek solutions in that context. Rather, they relied for advice and assistance on their own female kin, particularly their mothers and older sisters, with whom they shared a different set of values strongly supportive of the nurture of children. The following section of this report describes the social interactions that occurred as these youths confronted impending fatherhood.

Confronting Pregnancy

At the time when their partners became pregnant, the fathers interviewed were in a broad range of situations with respect to their involvements in school, work, crime, and to their relationships to the girls they had impregnated. Their responses to the pregnancy were shaped by all these factors but also, importantly, by the responses of the girls' families and their own families. Although uncertainty and confusion characterized much of their own and others' reactions, the various parties in these situations underwent negotiations during and after the pregnancy which led to the social establishment of paternity and associated rights and duties. Folk rather than legal norms dominated these negotiations. Recourse to legal sanctions was unusual.

For the males, establishing paternity could involve three successive stages. First, they had to establish to their own satisfaction that they had caused the pregnancy. If they were convinced, they then had to decide whether to acknowledge paternity to the girls, the girls' families, and their own families. Finally, they had to choose whether or not to acknowledge paternity legally by signing the birth certificate.

None of those interviewed for this study reported ever having denied paternity in a case in which they thought they really were responsible, though all of them said that they did know peers who had denied paternity in cases where others in the community thought them responsible. Stan described one acquaintance as follows:

> Stan: He got five kids, but he only claim one. That's the first one. He got to claim that one because he signed the birth certificate. After that, he learned better and he didn't sign no more.

All those interviewed reported knowing peers who acknowledged children but accepted no responsibility for them. Even though they all claimed to know non-supporting fathers, they said that they and others in their community saw nothing to respect in a male who did not at least try to support his children in some way. Harold described some of his acquaintances as follows:

> Interviewer: Do you know guys who make babies and don't care?
>
> Harold: Yeah, I know quite a few who say, "I got a daughter who lives over here and a son who lives over there" and the way they say it, it seems like they don't care. When you ask them about it, they may say, "Well, I don't know how long I'm going to

> live, so I'm looking to have as many as I can while I'm able to."
>
> Interviewer: Do they seem proud when they say it?
>
> Harold: Let's put it this way. They don't get no respect from me on that. I can understand if it happens, but it ain't nothing to brag about.

Tom went even further in his assessment of the situation of non-supporting fathers:

> Interviewer: Have you known guys who make babies and don't take care of them?
>
> Tom: Yeah, I seen it, but I don't like it. I've seen what happens on both sides of that situation. There's the girl. She's got nobody to take care of her or the baby. And the guy too. He loses his self-respect. Not only that but everyone else loses respect for him too. Sometimes it makes him go out and start ripping everybody off. I mean, even if he was doing that before, it makes him worse, it makes him get real bad and nasty. If one of my friends did that, I wouldn't talk to him any more.
>
> Interviewer: In that situation, wouldn't the guy be better off just saying it wasn't even his?
>
> Tom: True, they might do that. But it's hard to hide. People know things about you, how long you been with her, or who she's been with or not. Plus, if it looks like you and she says it's yours, then nobody's going to believe it isn't yours.

Establishing paternity to their individual satisfaction, however, was a genuine problem for some of these youths especially if their sexual contact with the female had been casual. Zap and Harold had both been through situations in which females first claimed to have been impregnated by them and then retracted the claim. Both of them reported that they had doubted their paternity from the beginning but had still been willing to assume some responsibilities for the children in case they were wrong.

Harold was 15 when he began a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old female who had previously been involved with another male for over three years:

> Harold: I hardly knew her. I met her with some friends once, then we met about a week later and exchanged numbers and we talked to each other every day and by the end of the week I came to her house and we had sex.
>
> Interviewer: And then she told you soon after that that she was pregnant?
>
> Harold: She didn't exactly tell me she was pregnant. She told me she thought she was pregnant. She told me her period hadn't come yet and we started talking about what we would do if she was pregnant. She told me she had had an abortion and didn't want to have another one. The whole thing was a shock to me. I consider that a turning point in my life as far as a sense of concern. That's when I started realizing sex wasn't just jumping into bed.
>
> Interviewer: But did she tell you she thought you were responsible?
>
> Harold: Right. And from what she was telling me, she hadn't had sex with him for more than a month and I was the only one who had had sex with her. That was kind of hard for me to believe. I mean, you going with a guy for three years and all of a sudden you have an affair and pop up pregnant. I told her this when she brought it up. I was like, shocked, but at the same time I was telling her that I wouldn't abandon her because I can never picture myself leaving a girl, going out and trying to forget all about her when I know she's carrying my baby and eventually my baby will be out in the world and possibly calling somebody else daddy. So after that confrontation, we didn't speak for about a month and I was wondering if she was pregnant by me and maybe she would have the baby and tell her boyfriend it was his. As it turns out, she wasn't so it was really all over nothing.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think she might have had an abortion?
>
> Harold: I think she did have an abortion, but I don't know for sure.

When Zap was 18, a 19-year-old girl with whom he had only recently begun a sexual relationship also told him that he had made her pregnant. Though he had been practicing withdrawal, he thought she might be right. Only after the baby was born and he had been helping her out with money did she finally tell him that the child was not his.

> Zap: She was pregnant when I started talking to her, but she wasn't showing yet. And then, after I got it, all of a sudden she said it was mine. I figured I'd wait and see if it looked like me. All the babies in my family got this look. And then, after it was born, we sat down and talked and she said, "I ain't going to lie to you. I think I had this by" so-and-so and she showed me a picture of the guy. I think he was in jail. So I said "later for it" then and now I got somebody new and she got somebody new, but it's alright. We still friends. She knows where I live, so if she needs something really bad, she calls me up and says, "I need Pampers, milk" and if I got money, I help her out.

Stan eventually established co-residence with his girlfriend and their child, but he described his doubts when she first told him she was pregnant. At the time he was 19. She was 20 and enrolled in college. Even though they had been together sometime, he had doubts at first because of what he knew about her older sister:

> Stan: It wasn't anything planned. I was just running in the streets then, not thinking about having a baby. At first, I was saying, "Well, damn, could it be mine?" But I didn't say anything. I knew it had to be mine because we were one to one for a year. But then, in the back of my mind, I was thinking "Did she mess around with anybody."
>
> Interviewer: Didn't you tell me before that it had something to do with her older sister, that there is some kind of dispute over who's the father of her sister's kid?
>
> Stan: ... who the father is of one of her kids. Because her sister had been messing around with

> two guys. She already had one kid and then she was pregnant with another one and she didn't know who the father was. She'll say it's the father of the first one, but up to this day she doesn't know.
>
> Interviewer: And knowing that made you doubt your girl?
>
> Stan: Yeah. I knew all about that. That made me think. But then I had to trust her and she trusted me, so I realized it was mine and I had to try to do something for it.

When Harold impregnated the female who eventually bore his child, he had shared his doubts about his paternity with his older sister. She had explained to him about blood tests and told him how to get one. He insisted on the test, even though it caused a fight with the mother. Only after the test did not rule out his paternity did he fully acknowledge the child by signing the birth certificate. None of the others interviewed reported refusing to sign the birth certificate. Most eventually did so, though Mike said he "hadn't gotten around to it."

After establishing to their own satisfaction that they had caused a pregnancy, the next stage involved deciding what to do about it. As described above, all of these youths said that they knew peers who had abandoned girls in this situation, though not without personal cost in terms of self-esteem and community reputation and also loss of rights to a relationship with the child and the mother. Those described here were unwilling to take this course. Some had established with the females relationships that they wished to continue. Others were less sure about the future of their romantic relationship but still expressed respect for the female and unwillingness to abandon her. Regardless of the depth of romantic feeling, all expressed strong feelings of paternity and unwillingness to give up any voice in deciding whether their children should be born or how they would be raised. The next step for them involved consideration of two alternative courses: abortion or providing some kind of support. At this point, the situation began to involve the families of both the male and female. Decisions about abortion and support were not taken, nor practically speaking could they have been taken in most cases, without the involvement of their families. They and their girlfriends had little knowledge of where to obtain abortions and limited financial resources either for abortions or for full child support.

Abortion

All of the youths interviewed knew about abortion at the time they learned of their partners' pregnancies. Some of them reported that they or others involved had considered the possibility of abortion, but none of them reported being certain that they had ever caused a pregnancy that terminated in abortion. Most of these youths expressed strong feelings against abortion. In view of the fact that this sample was recruited from among those openly acknowledging fatherhood, this is not surprising. Statistics do in fact indicate that more than half of adolescent pregnancies in Projectville terminate in abortion and that this percentage has increased over the past several years as abortion has become more available (Center for Public Advocacy Research, 1982). Nonetheless, the rates of illegitimate births to Projectville teenagers remain among the highest in the city. The feelings and decisions described by these youths were described in remarkably similar terms, several of them expressing the twin sentiments that they considered abortion to be a matter of choice but that they personally considered it to be "murder."

The case studies presented here of the consideration of abortion by these adolescents and their families raise the issue of the relationships between early childbearing and economic stratification among blacks (McClanahan, 1985). The data presented here are too limited to resolve this issue but do suggest some of the dimensions of the social process by which Projectville residents weigh decisions for or against abortion for young, unmarried, pregnant females.

Stack has described the process by which upwardly mobile ghetto residents must extricate themselves from the networks of sharing and cooperating kin which allow most ghetto households to survive. In the material discussed below, the choice of abortion appears also to be associated with aspirations for upward mobility while the decision to carry a pregnancy to term even when the mother is young and unmarried is embedded in a widely shared system of values and economic strategies in which the nurture of children is not tied to stable employment, even though stable employment is considered a prerequisite for marriage.

The youths interviewed were very spontaneous and emotional in their disapproval of abortion. They described immediate and very personal rejections of the idea. They also described receiving considerable support in this regard from their families in the form of assurances that the child would be cared for by the relatives of both the young parents.

For the male youths interviewed, the pregnancy of their girlfriends and the possibility of abortion posed a series of personal dilemmas specific to those of their age and gender within their communities. Most of them had little hope of being able to secure in the near future stable employment sufficient to support a family. Most of them also had not grown up being fully supported by their own fathers. At the point when they themselves confronted becoming fathers without being able to support their children, they were forced to realize that their own parents had probably been in the same situation. If they then contemplated abortion and projected the possibility backwards in their own biographies, they encountered the possibility of their non-existence as well as the possibility that they might never have children if they tried to plan parenthood on the basis of economic preparedness. Jesse and Ollie used the same words to describe their own personal feelings about the undesirability of abortion: "My mother didn't."

The desire to escape poverty coexisted in them along with the desire to affirm life in the face of poverty. As with their attitudes toward education, they shared in middle-class values but realized that they might lack the resources ever to enact them. They both valued freedom from early parental responsibilities and experienced considerable difficulty in maintaining that freedom when confronted with impending fatherhood. Though they had strong feelings against abortion, they also recognized the difficulties of early parenthood. As the pregnancies they had caused came to the attention of their own families, they also came in more direct contact with the experiences of older people who, though also sharing much feeling against abortion, tended to be more cautionary about the consequences of adolescent childbearing.

Stan and Mike both reported some support for abortion from the older people involved. When Stan's girlfriend became pregnant, her mother had urged her to get an abortion, even though Stan and her daughter had maintained a stable relationship for a year and wanted to bear and raise the child:

> Stan: She was going to college then and her mother wanted her to have the abortion, 'cause she felt I couldn't take care of it. She wanted her to finish school and everything. She wanted her to have that abortion, but that worried me because suppose something should happen to her ... and the baby. So I said to myself maybe it's time to face reality and deal with it, you know. So we sat down and talked about it and we said we would have it. I talked to her mother. Her mother was against it because I didn't have a job, but she said her daughter could stay and the baby could stay. I just had to get myself a job and once I got myself a good job with some money coming in, then they would have to go out and I would have to support them.

Mike and his girlfriend had also been together for a year when she became pregnant, though they were younger at the time. Stan was 19 and his girlfriend 20 when they conceived. Mike and his girlfriend were both only 16 and still attending school regularly. Mike reported that he and she had discussed abortion after she discovered she was pregnant:

> Mike: We talked about it once and she said she was going to go ahead and do it, but then she was thinking about it and she didn't want to do it.
>
> Interviewer: What did her mother say about it? What did your mother say about it?
>
> Mike: See, it was up to her. My mother and her mother said, "It's up to you." My mother said, "If you don't want to [have an abortion], you

> don't have to." And her mother said the same thing and she kept it.

Although his mother supported the birth in this case, Mike added that, "If it was my sister, my mother would want her to have an abortion though, I know she would."

Some of the youths also reported some ambivalence themselves with regard to abortion. Ollie reported that he had initially thought of abortion when he learned of the pregnancy, but that he kept the thought "inside" and never spoke of it to anyone else. Harold said that he had only told his closest friend about the pregnancy and his friend had immediately advised him to seek an abortion. The others also said that their objections to abortion were not absolute. Zap was the only one who said that his family absolutely opposed abortion on religious grounds. His father was a minister who had led a church for many years, "so when my sister got pregnant, that was that. She couldn't get an abortion because my father's a minister." The others were all asked specifically if their and their families' feelings about abortion were religious and replied negatively. Stan expressed horror over a case in which a young girl from the neighborhood was raped and then forced to bear the child conceived from the rape because of her mother's absolute religious objections to abortion.

Only one youth interviewed expressed any intention of helping obtain an abortion for a pregnancy he had caused. At the time of his second interview, after having described the difficulties of trying to provide financial assistance and care for his first child, Tom announced that his new girlfriend, not the mother of his first child, had told him the day before that she was pregnant and that she wanted an abortion. Only two weeks before, he had said that he still did not like or use contraception or approve of abortion. At the second interview, he expressed changed attitudes on both subjects. This incident and others recorded in the data suggest that abortion and contraception are in fact increasingly available and used in Projectville, but that their use does not extend to youths in their middle teens. The experience of pregnancy itself tends to precede and motivate the use of contraception and abortion.

Planning for the Birth: The Couples and Their Kin

The negotiations among the conceiving teenagers and their families over appropriate responses to the pregnancy did not address only the question of abortion. The decision not to obtain an abortion occurred simultaneously with explicit plans for financial support and care for the child and discussion of the various roles to be played by both parents and by both parents' kin. The decision to have the baby was the crucial negotiation establishing the rights and duties of fatherhood. If the biological father was not involved in the decision, his rights in the child could be immediately curtailed. If he was involved, then the process of negotiation established the precise nature of those rights and duties. In Stack's terms, these were "folk" definitions constrained by but not necessarily identical with those of the legal system.

The existing relationship of the conceiving couple was the starting point for the negotiations. Those interviewed were involved in a broad range of relationships with the girls whom they impregnated, and they all made clear distinctions between their relationships with the girls they had impregnated and their intended relationships with their children. Kevin had known the girl whom he made pregnant only a short time, having just met her at a party a few weeks before and just begun a sexual liaison. The rest had been involved in longer relationships. Some of the couples had known each other since childhood. Their romantic and/or sexual relationships had lasted from several months to a year or more. Mike and Stan expressed unreserved romantic attachment to the females and the hope and expectation that they would remain together and eventually marry. Lucky was married to the mother of another male's child. The others had stormier relationships and most, including Mike, had other sexual relationships than that with the girl they had made pregnant. Short of romantic commitment, however, most of these youths expressed respect for the girls they had impregnated and feelings of obligation toward them. Harold explained: "I'm not in love with her, but she's a nice girl. I'm not going to just leave her there."

Their feelings toward their children-to-be-born, on the other hand, were much more unequivocal. Although they had not planned to conceive them and had little practical hope of being able fully to support them in the near future, they expressed strong feelings of paternity. For many of them, the pregnancy caused them to reflect on their feelings of having grown up without the regular presence of their own fathers.

In order for the young men to retain rights to see their children or to maintain relationships with the mothers of their children, they had to express willingness to contribute money and care for the child. None of them at this point held a stable job which might support a marriage and family, excluding this option from consideration. None reported pressure to marry from the females or their families. They were all expected to look for some kind of work immediately in order for them to make some financial contribution. The question of whether they should terminate whatever involvement they had in school in order to seek full-time work was more complicated, since continued schooling for either parent might enhance prospects for long-term support.

In addition, the young fathers were usually expected to make some commitment to provide care for the child, in some cases directly but almost always with the assistance of their own female kin (Stack, 1974). Mike reported that his mother had told him to make sure that the child was his and that he really wanted to support it. If so, then she advised him to go ahead and have it and said that she would help. Ollie relied for advice primarily on his older sister:

> Ollie: She told me I should get in the habit of taking care of it right away. She said, "Otherwise you'll forget about it later on."

The male with neither employment nor a commitment from his female kin to care for the child risked losing his rights in his child. None of those interviewed had in fact lost rights in their children in this manner, but some nearly had done so and most knew of such cases.

The stories they told of the negotiation of the rights and duties of fatherhood contained few references to intervention by the courts. All were asked if anyone from the family of the girl they had made pregnant had ever mentioned legal action to bring about support. They all said that it had not been mentioned in their own cases, although two of them, Stan and Tom, reported that their own parents had been to court. Tom's father had paid child support for years. Stan's father had stopped all support after his mother had applied legal pressure. Both of these men were employed adults at the time of the court proceedings, however. In these youths' own cases, their lack of employment made them dubious targets for child support litigation. Only Stan could even recall a case among his peers of court pressure for child support. The details of that story confirm the impracticality of this solution:

> Stan: If I had to pay rent right off, I think I would have gone out there to rob everybody I could. To have to pay rent and tryin' to find a job. Where's the money gonna come from ... or I might've thought about suicide, you know ...
>
> Interviewer: You had said something about a friend of yours ...?
>
> Stan: Yeah, we grew up together. He was just like me, he wasn't thinking about being no father. He was thinking about jiving around and having fun and messing with the girls as usual and then his girlfriend wind up getting pregnant.
>
> Interviewer: Were they, like, boy and girl friend?
>
> Stan: They were close but, you know how you got two or three girls that you see, he had another girlfriend at the time, and then one of them came up and said "I'm pregnant" and it blew his head. And he started getting a whole lot of pressure, you know. First his mother, then they wanted to know if it was his, you know, then her mother was like "my daughter's not having no abortion. You have to take care of the baby." And for a kid in his senior year of high school that was tough.
>
> Interviewer: You said the girl's family brought legal action against him?

> Stan: Yeah, they used to bring the cops over, and then he used to have to go to court ... but he was only 17 years old! They couldn't understand about him having to go out there and work. That was all new to him. And then, you know, the cops coming down on him all the time, coming to his house, sending him papers saying you have to appear, the court, such and such date about child support payments ...
>
> Interviewer: So he was getting it from the girl, her family, the courts ...
>
> Stan: His own family too ... that's a lot of pressure for a kid, having a kid ... So then he used to get high a lot, angel dust, and I used to tell him "that angel dust will mess you up, it'll make you do things you don't want to do."
>
> Interviewer: Did he used to do that before?
>
> Stan: No, not the dust, he used to smoke reefer ... So one day after all the people and pressure was on him, his brother was in the room watching TV with him, he went in the living room and he told his brother "bye" and he went in his room and he just jumped out the window ... and it was really messed up because he landed on a gate and part of him was over here and part of him was over here ...

The only other mention in the interviews of legal intervention was Harold's account of one his friends who had been barred from seeing his child:

> Harold: He's 20 and his daughter's about 2 now. In the beginning, his girl's mother didn't mind for him to see the baby, but when she started realizing he wasn't doing anything for the baby she took him to court and I don't know exactly what happened when they were in court but what it led up to was that either he took care of the baby or he stay away from the baby and right now he has no visitation rights. He can't see the baby, be around the baby, you know. I don't know if he couldn't bother to take care of it or he really wasn't ready for it. See, he didn't have a job and maybe he didn't want to, you know, put his foot in his mouth and say he was gonna do something even though he couldn't do it. Right now I'm quite sure he's regretting it, and I know he wants to see the baby. But the girl and her mother moved to Queens, and right now she's staying with some other guy, so ...

Others also mentioned cases in which young fathers they knew had lost rights in their children, although as a result of folk rather than legal processes. Zap told of a dispute that had occurred downstairs in his building just before an interview:

> Zap: I know this one guy name Rich and he got a baby by this girl. He don't take care of the baby right. This other guy, you know, he is taking care of the baby, and he be looking out. Rich came back, and I saw their hands up in the hallway: "That's my baby." "I ain't going for it" and all of that. Meantime, Rich, you know, he probably just wanted to have sex with her, that's all.

As the above examples indicate, the negotiations of the rights and duties of fatherhood during pregnancy are part of an ongoing process that continues after the birth of the child. If the father makes no commitment to support before the child is born, he may lose his rights in his child and his sexual access to the mother or he may lose only some of those rights. If he has been socially recognized as the father, even without a commitment of support, he may try at a later date to assert his rights in the child or his sexual rights in the mother on the basis of his recognized paternity. If there has been a break in the relationship, however, he may well have to contend with another male who has begun to assume responsibilites both for the mother and the child. One of the outcomes of teen childbearing is teen stepfathering.

Finally, the ability of any male to maintain a relationship with a woman and her child depends heavily on his access to employment. The next section of this report deals with actual patterns of child support in relation to legitimate employment, underground employment, the welfare system, and continued investments in education and training. The rest of this section of the report deals with the way in which employment and crime opportunities and involvements affected these youths' initial commitments, or lack of them, to their children; and also with the establishment of stepfathering rights and duties in cases where the natural father has abandoned mother and child.

Harold's comment above regarding his friend who had been barred by the court from seeing his child, "See, he didn't have a job and maybe didn't want to, you know, put his foot in his mouth and say he was gonna do something even though he couldn't do it," was not the only remark recorded during the interviews which blamed unemployment for many young fathers' lack of commitment to their children. Zap expressed his opinion that many young men might be willing to support a women they liked along with their children, whether or not the children were theirs, if only they could find sufficient employment:

> Zap: Sometimes a guy got a nice job, you know, he don't mind trying, but if he ain't got no job, maybe he's afraid to try.

Ollie referred to the process of abandoning one's baby as "stepping off" and compared cases of direct abandonment with those in which lack of employment rather than lack of paternal feeling was the motivating cause:

> Ollie: Some of them, they say they just stepped off. In order not to step off, you got to have a job, got to get you a job. Cause, if you don't get a job, and you're not supporting the baby, you ain't see the baby. You going to want to buy the baby Pampers, food, clothes, or whatever. You ain't got the money. You know the baby's mother and the baby's mother mother, I know they're going to have money to kick out for the baby, and if you ain't got no money, you got to step off.

> Interviewer: In other words, it might not be something that they want to do, but they feel like they can't even go see the child if they don't have some money?
>
> Ollie: Yeah, that's how it is. It's not like they just lay off ... ah, some of my friends, their girlfriends are ugly or they don't really like her, or they like her but not enough to have a baby by her ...
>
> Interviewer: So they just forget about it?
>
> Ollie: Right.
>
> Interviewer: But in other cases, they might want to do something about it but they can't because they don't have jobs?
>
> Ollie: That's one of the main cases.

During this period of their lives, many young males from Projectville are not only unemployed but are also involved on a fairly regular basis in illegal activities for profit. Arrest rates in Brooklyn are higher for young black males than for other comparable sectors of the population (Sviridoff with McElroy, 1984). The ethnographic studies that preceded this study found two characteristic crime patterns for teenagers in this neighborhood. The first consisted of intense, but relatively brief careers in street robbery usually ending with incarceration in state prisons. The second consisted of various forms of drug dealing, sometimes for short periods during a period of establishment in the legitimate labor market, other times as an alternative career that could persist into adulthood without extensive periods of incarceration.

Some of those interviewed for this study had been involved in these activities and others had not, but all had either experienced jail or prison or had close friends whose lives had been interrupted in this way. When asked generally why some of their friends did not support their children, most of them mentioned someone who could not do so because he was incarcerated. Incarceration was one of the kinds of "stepping off" that led to a break in the relationship and then, frequently, to assumption of a "stepfathering" role for another male.

These processes had played major parts in the experiences of Tom, Lucky, Kevin, Stan, and Zeke. Lucky is included in this study even though he did not become a father as a teenager because he married when he was 19 a young woman of the same age who had a year-old son whose father was in prison. Lucky's marriage, an unusual act considered rash by his friends, occurred within three months after Lucky himself was released from a 15-month prison sentence for robbery. Tom was in jail when he learned that his girlfriend was pregnant. He was released two months before the birth. Kevin was interviewed before his child was born and was in jail shortly after the birth. Stan and Zeke were providing regular child support money that they earned selling drugs.

All those who had been in jail had been sent there for violent crimes of the sort that are most characteristic of those in their middle and late teens. Although their crimes were most often economically motivated, they were also associated with a life-style highly unconducive to the sort of stability required for making and sustaining a commitment to child support. Those who reported low-level drug selling, in contrast, did not experience much incarceration and could be capable of providing regular income for child support either from drug selling or from drug selling combined or alternated with low-level, temporary employment. These and other patterns of support are described more fully below.

The experiences of these youths and their friends point to the structure of economic opportunities as a key factor complicating their participation in the negotiations of their rights and duties with respect to the children they fathered. "Stepping off" among them was precipitated as much by un- and underemployment and related involvement in crime leading to incarceration as by callousness. The families of the young mothers also recognized the scarcity of employment opportunities, however, and did not always insist on a job as a prerequisite for recognizing the young fathers of their children, especially if the couple had an established and warm relationship and the young father appeared to be "doing the best he could." For example, just after he described "stepping off," Ollie was asked whether his own lack of a job would prevent his seeing his child:

> Interviewer: You say you don't have a job right now. Does this make for problems for you going over to see your baby?
>
> Ollie: No. Not really, cause I had a job and I used to give my half. It's not like I just stopped.
>
> Interviewer: You just lost your job?
>
> Ollie: Right, see, she understands.

Also, in this case, their families had known each other for years. In other cases, the father's changing employment status could produce rapid changes in the amount of respect he received from the family of the mother of his child. Tom reported finding and being laid off from three jobs during the period after his baby was born:

> Interviewer: How do you get along with your girl's mother?
>
> Tom: When I'm working, I'm a prince. When I'm not working, I'm a demon.
>
> Interviewer: Doesn't she understand you got laid off?
>
> Tom: Nah. And I've been giving money right along. If I don't get it working, I get it hustling, but all she cares is if I'm working.

The next section of this report presents in more detail the actual patterns of family support reported by these youths after the births of the children they fathered.

Patterns of Support

All of the youths interviewed for this study were making some attempt to provide either financial support or child care for their children. They did not see themselves as necessarily representative of the population of young fathers in their neighborhood, since they all knew young fathers who were not supporting or attempting to support their children. Rather, they selected themselves for this study by responding to inquiries about young fathers. Even among this group of supporters, however, there was considerable variation in types, amounts, and continuity of the support that they did provide.

Their ability to carry out their commitments to child support depended heavily on the resources of time and access to the labor market available to them and other members of their families. Though they had not "stepped off" from their children as had some of their peers, they faced formidable obstacles in trying to secure an immediate and stable source of income. Most did not set up their own households immediately. They and the mothers of their children continued to live with their own parents while trying to finish school and/or find some kind of employment. This section of the report describes in detail the various householding and child care arrangements of these young parents along with their attempts to enter the labor market and/or invest in further education in hopes of bettering their future labor market prospects.

At the time they became fathers, none of these youths was securely established in the labor market. Some were still attending school full time. Most had had some employment, but only for short periods and at jobs that were supplied either by youth employment programs or by small employers offering work that was temporary, part-time, and off-the-books. Several had had some involvement in income-generating crime and a few had had more extensive involvement in crime as a fairly regular source of income. Most had interrupted their education for some period of time yet still retained connections to the school system and hopes of gaining educational and training credentials. Previous research among some of these same youths and their peers documented considerable movement in and out of school, the labor market, and income-generating criminal activity during their middle and late teens (Sullivan, 1984).

Since none of the youths was capable of providing full child care or financial support, the eventual arrangements depended a great deal on the resources available from the other members of their families. Those families heavily dependent on welfare generally had poorer labor market networks which might provide young parents with access to jobs and fewer financial resources to support continued school attendance. Families with more workers had fewer people available for child care. As was pointed out earlier, about half of the households in this area receive public assistance and receipt of public assistance appears to be tied as much to the domestic cycle as to distinct populations of "workers" and "welfare recipients." In fact, many households combine both categories, either legitimately or illegitimately. The resources of time and money contributed by each of the young parents and their respective families were dependent on the situation of that household with respect to the labor market, the welfare system, and the availability of other social services. The wide variety of such arrangments within the neighborhood led to a wide variety of situations with respect to the care and financial support of the children of these young parents.

Though all these youths reported feeling great pressure to find jobs, the younger ones, aged 16 and 17 reported more continuing school involvement. Because of their youth, they generally had experienced less interruption of school attendance and also faced much greater barriers to labor market access.

Ollie was 16 and the youngest of those interviewed. When contacted, he had a 6-month-old daughter. Ollie lived with his mother and two older sisters and their household was supported primarily by public assistance. The mother of his child came from a family supported primarily by wages. Her father had a stable, relatively well-paying, unionized, blue-collar job. Her mother did domestic work one day a week. Both families knew each other well, and the two young parents had grown up together. The decision to have the child and the arrangements for child care and support were worked out with the involvement of both families.

Ollie's only employment before the pregnancy had been in a government-sponsored summer youth job when he was 14. He reported no arrests or involvement in serious crime. During the pregnancy, he found two separate part-time jobs in fast food restaurants. He worked a few hours a week at each job before being laid off. The first job lasted four months, the second less than three. Ollie had maintained almost continuous school attendance and was still at the proper grade level for his age. He had found both jobs through his school's employment service. When contacted, he was unemployed, seeking more part-time work, and attending school. The mother of his child was also attending school in a special program for young mothers. She had begun independent study in the program even before the baby was born and resumed attendance shortly after the birth. She attended school four days a week while her mother cared for the baby and studied at home on the day her mother worked. Financial support for the baby was provided by her working parents and not by public assistance. When Ollie was working, he earned $53 a week, of which he gave about half to the baby's mother. The other half went to his mother one week and toward his own expenses the alternate week. Ollie and his family also contributed regular child care. He spent each afternoon at her house and the two of them cared for the baby. The baby also spent some afternoons and most weekend days at his house during which time his mother and sisters took care of the child. Both young parents intended to finish their high school educations before seeking full-time work and were supported in these aspirations by their own families. Ollie expressed his commitment to the child but felt too young to marry and unsure of his romantic commitment to the mother.

Mike was 17 when contacted and his son had just been born. Mike had attended school only irregularly in the tenth grade and had been left back one grade. During that period, he also had had some involvement with street crime which ended with an arrest for jostling (trying to pick a pocket). His prior employment consisted of two summer youth jobs and one brief part-time job as a messenger after school. He had been seeking work unsuccessfully since he learned of the pregnancy and had renewed his involvement in school, switching from the regular curriculum in which he was behind to a GED (General Equivalency Diploma) program in the morning and vocational training in computers in the afternoon.

The families of both Mike and the mother of his child were supported primarily by transfer payments, Mike's by his deceased father's Social Security and Army pensions, her's by public assistance. Mike and the mother of his child were romantically committed to each other, though he had other girlfriends on the side, saying "I love her, but a man's going to be a man." After the birth, his girlfriend did not apply for public assistance. She also sought work and was more successful than he. She found a full-time job in a fast food restaurant and quit school to work. If he found a job, she planned to quit her job and stay home with the baby. She had no immediate plans to return to school.

The complex child care arrangements were split almost equally between the two young parents' households. Her mother was home with her own 2-year-old and cared for her older daughter's baby during the morning. Then Mike came over between his morning and afternoon classes and took the baby back over to his house for the afternoon. His mother was at home all day and also his older sister who was 19 and pregnant herself. When the mother of Mike's child got off work, she came over to his house, stayed there for dinner and part of the evening, then returned with the baby to her parents' home for the night. Mike himself viewed this division of child care as a right rather than a duty:

> Mike: We had to compromise on that. See, I wasn't going to let her keep the baby all the time.

Mike reported that both families, after initial surprise and concern, had been happy and excited about the baby. In the few weeks since the birth, they had made the rounds of relatives throughout the city, showing off the baby. At the same time, Mike and his family were both very concerned that he find employment and also stay in school. Mike had wanted to go away to a state college like an older friend of his but now thought he would at best attend college locally. His girlfriend was depressed at being away from school and her former social life. She knew about the program for young mothers in which the mother of Ollie's child was enrolled but was too harried by the pressure of work and child care to think of returning to school. All concerned wanted to avoid applying for public assistance, but foresaw the possibility of having to do so.

Harold was 17 when contacted and the father of a son 2 months old. He lived with his mother who had been a public school teacher for years and he had grown up more comfortably than many of his friends, saying "I never was into stealing, because I never had to." Nonetheless, he had gone through a period of irregular school attendance and hanging out when he was 16. He had had summer youth jobs but not since he was 15. During the pregnancy, he also had renewed his efforts in school by entering a GED program. He had also been seeking work, "Only part-time until I know I passed the GED," but unsuccessfully. When first interviewed, he was awaiting the results of his GED examination. At a subsequent interview, he reported that he had passed the test and had immediately begun seeking full-time work. He found a job in the stock room of a department store soon after.

During the week, Harold's child was cared for primarily by its mother and her mother. The mother of Harold's child was 17 and planned to stay home with the baby for the rest of the school year and then try to resume high school the following September. Her mother would take care of the baby when she went back to school. Her mother was then receiving public assistance as well as occasional contributions from her non-resident husband. The mother of Harold's child had enrolled herself and the baby on a separate public assistance budget in the same household. They also had enrolled in WIC (Women and Infant Care) and received Medicaid.

Harold did not get along with the father of the mother of his child and avoided being there when the father was present.

He did spend most weekday afternoons at their apartment, however. On Friday afternoons, they took the baby over to his apartment where it remained until Sunday evening. His mother and two older sisters, one of whom had her own 2 year old, provided direct care for the baby when it was at his house. Harold maintained some romantic feeling for the mother of his child, but was unsure whether they eventually want to be together or not:

> Harold: I feel we'll always be together, due to the child, regardless of whether we're separated or she doing her own thing or I'm doing my own thing, we'll always be friends, if not lovers. It's that type of relationship. Right now, I do my own thing, but what I don't want is to make her angry and want to get revenge. In a way, I don't want to see her with another guy, but if she does go with another guy, I want it to be because she likes him, not just because she wants to get back at me.
>
> Interviewer: Are you saying you might eventually want to be with her?
>
> Harold: Maybe.

His other plans for the future included working and contributing money for his child and also attending community college:

> Harold: At least if I get two years of college under my belt, I've something to lean back on. The GED's really nothing you know.

Jesse was 18 when interviewed and the father of a year-old son. Jesse had finished high school eight months before, completing his regular diploma only three months late after making up one course over the summer. He had attended school regularly and his only employment before graduation had been in a school-based cooperative program. He had had very little involvement in crime. After completing high school, he entered a job program, completed their training course, and found a job placement two months later. He and the mother of his child were not absolutely committed to one another, but he said that the two of them had been "happy about the baby, but not happy that I couldn't take care of it." He worked most of the next six months, bringing home about $130 each week and giving $30 of that to the mother of his child and $40 to his mother. Jesse lived with his mother, who was supported by court-ordered child support payments from Jesse's father who did not live with them but did stay there occasionally. Jesse's mother, who also had three other children, had received partial public assistance and Medicaid until recent cutbacks.

The mother of Jesse's son lived with her mother, who worked part-time and received partial public assistance. The mother of Jesse's son also found work when the baby was 6 months old, about the same time as Jesse. Her mother and sisters cared for her child while she worked. Jesse took the baby to his house many weekends and "sometimes for a whole week." His older sister was home with a small child. The mother of Jesse's son did not receive direct public assistance payments but did receive Medicaid and was enrolled in WIC. Jesse's first job placement, as a shipping clerk, lasted three months and ended in a layoff. He received one more placement from the job program and worked another three months in a similar job. He was fired from that after a dispute that he later regretted. When last contacted, he was unemployed and looking for work.

Only one set of young parents among those contacted had set up their own household by the time they were 18. Steve was living with the mother of his child and their daughter while he was still only 18 and the mother was only 17. The mother had become an emancipated minor after disputes with her own mother and placements in youth homes. She managed to get out of the last youth home shortly before the child was born, and Steve found them an apartment in one of Projectville's few remaining tenement buildings. The two of them had grown up in the projects in families supported by stable employment. They had been forced to apply for welfare, and the tenement apartment was the only place they could find that they could afford. They considered both the apartment and welfare enrollment "a step down." Steve had especially resisted welfare, but had finally given in. He enrolled along with the mother and child.

As children of working parents, they did have some advantages in finding work. Steve had quit school during the pregnancy to look for work. His girlfriend had not gone to regular school for some time. Their first source of income was a GED program that paid $80 a week in stipends. They located the program through Steve's mother's church and both enrolled. Then Steve's father found him a full-time job at the factory where he himself had worked for many years. Steve quit the program for that job, and then was laid off from the job. By that time, the baby had been born and his girlfriend withdrew from the program also in order to care for the child. It was at this point that they enrolled for public assistance and moved into the tenement. When first contacted, Steve was applying unsucessfully for jobs and was angry and depressed. After a few months of this, he was called back to his father's factory and their public assistance grant was cut back.

The young fathers described thus far had had relatively little involvement in crime and, in spite of considerable difficulties, had tried to maintain conventional commitments to school and work. Many other Projectville youths go through a period when they are very little involved in school or work and become more extensively involved in crime. Some of the young fathers interviewed reported such life-styles and the ways in which they reacted to fatherhood while so involved. These individuals became fathers at the age of 18 or 19 after having been away from school for some time and variously involved in working, stealing, or selling drugs. An earlier study has documented the difference in career patterns in Projectville for street crime, which usually declines rapidly beginning in the late teens, and drug selling, which may develop into a much longer full- or part-time career. Among the fathers interviewed for this study who reported significant crime involvement, there also appeared to be a difference between involvement in street crime and involvement in drug selling in their effects on the father's ability to maintain family responsibilities. Street crime was associated with a life-style incompatible with family responsibilities, especially when it led to incarceration. Drug selling, on the other hand, could become a fairly stable source of income which might help to support children.

Tom was in jail when he discovered that his girlfriend was pregnant. He was released shortly before the birth and returned to angry confrontations with his girlfriend. He was 18 at the time and still attending school, though he was regularly involved in selling drugs: "Selling drugs was like my after-school job."

He had been incarcerated for six months for an assault and had been through two previous short stretches in jail, one for assault and one while detained for a robbery charge that was later dismissed. After the baby was born, he continued in his previous life-style, staying out late, selling drugs, fighting, and still managing to attend school. He went on this way for the first year of his daughter's life and then began to take his responsibilities more seriously. During the next year, he finished high school and found three different jobs, all of which terminated in layoffs. He still sold drugs, but not as much as when he was not working. Whether working or hustling, he contributed about $50 each week for his child. At one point, he and the mother of his child had a dispute about her handling of the money. He thought that she had been spending it to get high with her friends. Thereafter, he always gave the money to the baby's grandmother. As described earlier, the grandmother treated him much differently when he was working than when he was not working.

The child was cared for mostly by its mother. Their household was supported by her mother, who worked. Tom also took the child to his house frequently. When interviewed he was 20 and his son was 2 years old. He and the mother of his son were on friendly terms, but no longer lovers. She had a new man by then. Tom reported that he frequently took care of the child by himself, sometimes getting together with two male peers and their children.

Kevin was interviewed just before the birth of his child. He was 19 and expressed a strong desire to take care of the child when it was born, yet his relationship with the mother was very fragile since he had just met her when she became pregnant. He was looking for work at the time. The mother of his child was applying for public assistance for herself and the child. He was contacted by phone two months later but did not have time for an interview because he had found a job. Two months later, his friends reported that he was in jail for robbery. Of all those interviewed, he appears least likely to maintain connection with his child because of the lack of a strong relationship with the mother and because his incarceration will make it difficult for him to establish social paternity by contributing money.

Zeke was another 18-year-old father oscillating between work and crime. Zeke lived with his mother in a household supported by public assistance and the mother of his child lived with her mother who was employed full time. He had not been attending school regularly or working for the past two or three years, but managed to find two jobs in the first three months after his child was born. Both jobs ended in layoffs. He also enrolled in a GED program in between the two jobs but withdrew from school again when he found the second job. After the second legitimate job, he found an underground "job" working in a storefront in an abandoned building selling marijuana through a slot in the wall. The mother of his child went back to school immediately. She did not apply for public assistance. She brought the child over to Zeke's house in the morning before she went to school. Zeke and his mother watched the child until the child's mother came back in the early afternoon. The young parents then went back to her house with the baby. Zeke stayed there until shortly before his six to midnight shift at the reefer store. Zeke made $200 a week at the reefer store compared to $150 after taxes at his straight jobs. He reported giving half to the baby's mother. Though the pay was better than legitimate work, he feared that the police would raid the operation and possibly arrest him. The raid finally happened. He was not arrested but was once again without regular income. He then reverted to occasional street crime, shoplifting and picking pockets. He appeared desperate and confused during the interviews. His daughter was the only subject about which he talked with any enthusiasm.

The other youths interviewed were actually aged 20 to 21 when interviewed, though they had all assumed some paternal responsibilites before the age of 20. They had also all had some experience with street crime but had ceased any extensive involvement in stealing. The pressures of child support pushed them into more intensive job search rather than into renewed commitment to schooling. Finding and keeping jobs were still extremely difficult for them, however. They went months without work, and the jobs they did find were not secure or sufficiently well-paying to allow them to assume full child support.

Zap's relationship with a former girlfriend was described earlier. She had told him when she was pregnant that he was the father but then told him after the birth that he was not the father. Zap was 18 at that time and had been steadily employed for over a year, albeit at a low-wage job delivering dry cleaning. He had begun helping her out with money while she was claiming that he was the father. Even after she no longer made that claim, he still helped her out occasionally with money for milk and diapers. His support was only occasional and was based on the fact that they had been and still sometimes were lovers as well as on the not completely eradicated notion that the child might be his:

> Zap: Who knows? Maybe he'll start looking more like me when he gets older. Then I'll start clocking some more money that way.

By the time he reached 21, however, Zap had consciously fathered his own child. Zap had in fact had considerably steadier employment than most of his peers. His own involvements in street crime had been fairly extensive between the ages of 14 and 16, but he had ceased his involvement in both crime and in school by the time he was 16. He went through several months of unemployment, but then began to find work through family networks. He had grown up in a household supported by his father's job as a City bus driver. His father also led a church congregation on the weekends, and members of the congregation supplied Zap with leads to employment. After some false starts, Zap began working in the dry cleaners and maintained that employment for the next few years. He also had avoided fatherhood, while being very sexually active, by practicing regular withdrawal. Asked why he had finally fathered a child intentionally after all that time, he replied:

> Zap: Good question. I guess I wanted to keep her. Plus, I like kids. If I had a good job, I'd have lots of them. My parents raised eight of us.

He supported his child and the mother out of his wages for the first few weeks after the birth. Then the cleaners was sold and he lost his job after several years of steady employment. At this point, he began to fight with his girlfriend because he could no longer bring in money. He was still living with his parents, and she had an unstable residential situation, moving between her sister's and her aunt's apartments. At this point, Zap reported that he got mad and simply stayed away from her for a few weeks:

> Zap: Then I came back and she was glad to see me.

When last contacted, he was still unemployed and desperately seeking work. The mother of his child had just applied for public assistance for herself and the child.

Lucky had had extensive involvement in street crime during his middle teens and had just been released from a prison term of over a year when he met a young woman with a small child. The father of her child was himself in prison at this time. Lucky and she were both 19 then. They were legally married within a few months of his return from prison, a bold and unusual act much commented on by Lucky's peers. Lucky's wife was living with her mother at the time, under difficult circumstances. Her mother drank and beat her sometimes, which was part of the reason she and Lucky got married. Lucky's wife and her child were enrolled for public assistance at the time. His wife's mother, angry at the prospect of losing that welfare budget in her own household, reported their marriage to the welfare office. Lucky then had to enroll on their welfare budget. They found their own apartment, also in some rundown tenements near the projects where they had both grown up.

Lucky had had almost no work experience before prison, but now began seeking work in earnest. Over the next year, he found several jobs but none of them lasted. The first and best-paying of the jobs he found through an employment program. He lost the job both because he tended to be absent but also because some of his friends had involved him in a cocaine-selling operation which was paying him more than the job for a few hours work a week. His friends were soon arrested and out of business, however, and Lucky decided not to become further involved in drugs, which he did not himself use, and to seek further legitimate work. He found several jobs over the next year, but none that had paid as well as the factory job he had found through the employment program. He worked as a messenger and delivering groceries but earned less than $75 a week and quit to look for better work.

He had reported his first factory job to the welfare office, but had lost the job before their budget was adjusted. The delivery jobs were off-the-books and he did not report them. Then he found another factory job and registered under a false Social Security number. For a few months, they were doing fairly well with two incomes and managed to furnish their apartment. Lucky was then injured on the job. He collected workmen's compensation for some weeks more, but did not go back to the job and began again finding low-paying temporary jobs working off-the-books.

During this time, he also fathered a child intentionally by his wife. Though he still was not stably employed, he had managed to avoid further arrest or serious involvement in crime and had survived a year of the marriage that his peers had thought would not last. Lucky reported that she had been unsure about having a second child but that he had "figured it was time now." The pending release from prison of the father of his wife's first child also weighed on his mind. When last contacted, he was awaiting the birth of his child and seeking work. His stepson was 2 years old and was cared for mostly by its mother. Lucky's wife never let her own mother keep the child, but she and Lucky did leave the child with her aunt sometimes and also with her grandmother. They also took the child to Lucky's mother sometimes. At one point when Lucky had no work, his wife had not yet gotten pregnant again, and they were feeling the constraints of a welfare budget, Lucky's wife had gone out looking for work. If she had found it, she planned to leave her child with her aunt during the week and bring him back to their apartment only on weekends. Although Lucky's mother had received public assistance when he was a child, she was now employed and could not care for the child during working hours.

Stan's son was born when he was 19 and was 2 years old when Stan was interviewed. Stan was then living with the mother of his child and referred to her as his "wife" even though they were not legally married. At the time the child was conceived, Stan had just managed to finish high school. He had been out of school and had gone back through a special program where he received individual attention that allowed him to finish. He had had some part-time work, but most of his employment while he was in school was in his father's "numbers store" where he took illegal bets and also sold some marijuana. Stan's father had abandoned his mother and children some years before and Stan still resented it, admitting that his father probably gave him work to make up for having abandoned them but insisting that he treated his father like "the boss" rather than like his father.

Stan's wife had been attending college when she became pregnant. She was a year older than he, 20 at the time. Her mother had wanted her to get an abortion and continue college, but she and Stan had decided that they wanted to have the child. Her mother finally agreed, saying that she could remain there until Stan found a job. In the meantime, she enrolled for public assistance and received a budget for herself and the child at her mother's house. Stan found a job delivering groceries and the two of them found their own apartment, although his presence was unknown to the welfare office. They managed to survive this way for eight months. Then Stan was laid off. He began seeking work everywhere, but unsuccessfully. At the time of the interview, they were still living together and receiving public assistance for the mother and child. Stan had gone back to selling marijuana, remaining as discreet as possible in order to avoid arrest and bringing in a fairly regular income. He still sought work regularly, but feared that he might not be able to escape the drug trade.

These data reveal quite a wide variety of patterns of child support among these young men. The data also suggest that their contributions of support go largely unrecognized in official records and reports of survey research. Five out of the eleven interviewed reported that their children were not being supported by public assistance. Of the seven whose children were being supported by public assistance, only two, Lucky and Steve, were known to public assistance officials. All those receiving public assistance reported disliking the situation and planning to get off of public assistance if only they could secure decent employment. Several also reported that their children spent appreciable amounts of time at the residences the young fathers shared with their own families. Such child care patterns are not reflected in reports of social surveys that ask simply where the child resides (Gershenson, 1973; Furstenberg, 1976).

Conclusions

This study has examined the social and sexual development of a small group of teen fathers from one inner-city neighborhood who were attempting to provide some child support, even though most of them were not married to or living with the mothers of their children.

The data presented here suggest that exploitative, thrill-seeking sexual behavior on their part did not preclude strong feelings of paternity. The young fathers, their peers who were non-supporting fathers, and other residents of their community all condemned the abandonment by fathers of their children. At the same time, all members of the community recognized the difficulty of obtaining jobs, particularly for those still in their teens. Under these circumstances, establishing the rights and duties of fatherhood involved making a commitment to seek work and/or continued education and to provide child care. Marriage and neo-local residence were generally considered ideals not immediately attainable.

The diversity of arrangements for child care and financial support within this small sample was quite remarkable. Child care was provided by both parents as well as by their own parents and other relatives. Financial support was provided by public assistance and by wage labor by the young father, the young mother, and their own parents. Some young fathers even made regular contributions of income from criminal activity. The sheer diversity of these arrangements even within this small group suggests that opportunity as much as moral character or ability determines who in this community works, receives welfare, or takes care of children. Some find jobs and provide for others for as long as the jobs last. Others who cannot find work receive public assistance and care for children. Movement in and out of both legal and illegal labor markets and on and off welfare rolls is constant. Householding patterns shift frequently in response to these movements. For young males, crime may be an important, albeit unstable, source of income. Extensive involvement in theft tends to disrupt their family ties, but selling drugs can provide a source of income as reliable as many of the jobs they are able to find, when they are able to find jobs at all.

Though it is not possible to predict the future family and householding patterns of those described here, the experiences of older members of their families suggest that many of these family and support patterns will not last. The young parents are quite likely to establish new romantic relationships. The male who becomes attached to one of these young mothers will be expected to contribute something for her children. Nonetheless, the initial period of the young father's commitment will have established his social paternity. He will be remembered as the father of his child as long as both are present in the same community. He and his child will retain mutual claims on one another. Many of these young fathers will, like their own fathers, retain lifelong commitments to their children, even if they do not provide primary support.

These young people and their parents appear to agree with researchers who conclude that early childbearing is injurious to their future economic attainments, but Projectville residents also realize the hazard of betting on upward mobility. Delayed childbearing, like completion of high school, is seen as enhancing their chances to better themselves. Yet, the postponement of childbearing and the completion of high school may also yield nothing. In light of the ongoing prominence of structural employment and welfare dependency in their community, the payoff to middle-class aspiration is far from certain.

These data suggest several ways in which current social policies affect these patterns of fathering. Sex education programs in the schools were an important source of these youths' knowledge of reproduction, yet these programs fell short on the crucial issue of explaining contraception. The concentration of high rates of un- and underemployment along with high rates of welfare dependency in the same neighborhood encourages fathers to become invisible, less because of official prohibitions against the offical presence of the father than because fathers are expected to be breadwinners. New efforts to enforce child support payments, unless they also address employment problems, are likely to increase pressure on young men to avoid marriage and official co-residence with their children and the children's mothers.

Some other social policies appear to be alleviating these situations and should be pursued even more vigorously. New school policies and programs appear to be making it much easier for young parents to continue with their education (McLaughlin, 1984). Several of the mothers and fathers described here did not allow parenthood to disrupt their education and were taking advantage of these new programs. Others were taking advantage of health and nutritional benefits supplied by Medicaid and WIC. A local clinic was successfully supplying birth control and abortion referrals, although these services generally did not reach these youths until after the events of pregnancy and child-bearing. Though the young males described here experienced formidable labor market difficulties, employment programs were an important source of training and job placement for them. Several of those described here were of the opinion that many of their peers who were non-supporting fathers would gladly support if they could find employment.

Implications for Further Research

This study has suggested that a great deal of child support by unmarried teen fathers may be going on that is concealed from public scrutiny. Broader documentation of this trend would be extremely interesting, although difficult to achieve. Given the stake that these young families have in concealing the father's presence or contributions, perhaps only intensive ethnographic contacts of the kind reported here can elicit such information. The comparison of several such small-scale studies from different communities might yield broader generalizations than are possible on the basis of this report.

This report concentrated on only one neighborhood but grew out of an earlier study comparing three neighborhoods. The situations of several teen fathers in a second neighborhood were documented in that study. The population of that neighborhood was primarily Hispanic and was also characterized by high proportions of welfare dependency and officially female-headed households. Yet, there appear to have been some differences between patterns of fathering by teens in that neighborhood, referred to as La Barriada, from the patterns just described for Projectville. Health statistics indicate more live births than abortions for teenagers in La Barriada, the reverse of the situation in Projectville. The earlier study showed that youths from La Barriada leave school earlier than those from Projectville, enter the labor market earlier, and work in different types of jobs, those requiring less education. Field notes from the earlier study also suggest that the teen fathers in La Barriada were less likely to provide direct child care than their peers in Projectville. The data suggest, then, that both subcultural attitudes and different routes into the labor market may produce different patterns of fathering by teens from different inner-city neighborhoods. Further investigation of such community-specific patterns might provide valuable information for programmatic interventions in particular local environments.

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